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CONCERN OVER SHARP RISE IN SYPHILIS CASES

A SUDDEN rise in the number of people diagnosed with syphilis has prompted NHS bosses to issue a sexual health warning.

The advice comes after five positive cases were diagnosed at Medway Maritime Hospital in the past four weeks.

Just eight cases were diagnosed at the hospital in the whole of last year.

Dr Chula Wijesurendra, consultant in GU/HIV medicine, urged residents to consider the consequences before having unprotected sex.

■ BY SIMON ROBINSON

He said: "In 2010 we diagnosed eight cases. In the last four weeks alone, we've seen five cases and we're quite concerned about this unexpected rise.

"The symptoms of syphilis can be mild and as they often go away of their own accord it's easy to dismiss them and not seek the treatment you need. This means you could have the infection for years and pass it on to your partners without knowing you've got it.

"If you've had unprotected sex

and have experienced any of the symptoms, it's important you go to your nearest GUM clinic and get tested as soon as possible.

"It's easily treatable with antibiotics.

"You can reduce your risk of catching the infection by using a condom during sex and a dental dam when having oral sex.

"Practicing safe sex will not only help protect you against syphilis but other sexually transmitted infections as well."

Syphilis is a bacterial infection

CONTINUED ON PAGE 3



IT'S NICE TO BE SELFISH, SAYS SINGLE GIRL KELLY

Glamour girl Kelly Brook has revealed she found single life hard when she first split from Danny Cipriani last June.

The 31-year-old admitted that it took her a while to get used to her single status after ditching the England rugby union star, but said that she eventually found her feet.

She told celebrity magazine More: "Being single hit me hard at the beginning, but now I'm actually really enjoying it. I quite like my freedom and not answering to anyone. It's nice to be a bit selfish."

The model, actress and TV presenter, who was bought up in Rochester, has recently been linked with Glee star Matthew Morrison and British comedian Jack Whitehall.

She said that she would like to settle down in the future.

"I'm getting old, I've got to think about my future and security," she said. "A person would win me over with spontaneity, excitement, adventure, and lots of nice gifts."

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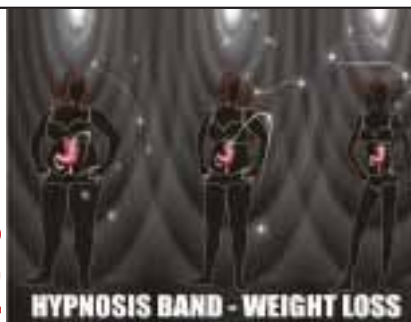
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Pupils hit the marks again with best-ever GCSE results

■ BY SIMON ROBINSON

MORE than three quarters of all Medway pupils hit a key exam marker in the towns' best-ever GCSE results.

In the tests, taken last summer, 77 per cent of the year group reached the target of five A* to C grades.

This statistic is up six per cent on the previous year and marks the sixth year in a row that Medway has posted improved results.

The record-breaking percentage is also up on the national average of 75 per cent.

Medway's schools also beat the national average for the number of students achieving five or more GCSE (or equivalent) grades at A* to C including English and Mathematics.

At 53.6 per cent, the results are up on the national average of 53.4 per cent and two per cent higher than last year's average for Medway of 51.7 per cent.

In addition, Medway's schools continue to do better in the number of students achieving five or more GCSE (or equivalent) passes at A* to G grades.

Exceptional

At 95.3 per cent, this beats Medway's result of 94.1 per cent last year and is higher than the regional average across the South East of 94 per cent.

Medway council children's services boss, Les Wicks, said: "We have seen exceptional results across the board this year and I would like to congratulate all the young people and teaching staff who have worked so hard.

"I am confident all of Medway's schools will continue to go from strength to strength and we are working to ensure schools are achieving above the National Challenge level and we are securing the best possible outcomes for our pupils."



MARKED IMPROVEMENT: Medway pupils have posted improved results for the sixth year in a row

Medway's post-16 results are also the best ever Medway has seen, and have improved for the fourth year in a row. Overall achievement is measured by a points system, which gives more points for higher grades.

On the measure of the average total points scored by each student, Medway's performance has improved significantly this year, with an increase of 35 points from last year.

This took Medway's average points per student to 733.2, higher than the national average of 726.

Children and adult services director Rose Collinson said: "Overall at Key Stage 4 and Post-16 these tables represent very good news for Medway's students and schools. Our young people are staying on and, increasingly, succeeding in learning.

"Our schools have a strong record of improvement and I am confident that we will reach the government target of having no Medway school below the National Challenge level by 2011.

"We are also working increasingly closely with local universities, MidKent College and local training providers to ensure that our young people can continue their success into higher and further education and develop the skills they need for

employment in an increasingly competitive world."

Six Medway schools saw nine out of ten pupils gaining five or more GCSE or equivalent A* to C grades including English and Mathematics.

These are Chatham Grammar School for Boys (97 per cent), Chatham Grammar School for Girls (98 per cent), Fort Pitt Grammar School (99 per cent), Rainham Mark Grammar School (98 per cent), Rochester Grammar School and Sir Joseph Williamsons Mathematical School (both 99 per cent).

The Howard School was the most improving school this year, with an increase of 10 per cent on last year to 53 per cent of pupils achieving five or more GCSE A* to C or equivalent including English and Mathematics.

Gad's Hill School was ranked as the top-performing independent school in the country.

The Higham school's A* GCSE results were also the eighth best recorded by any school in the country.

Headmaster David Craggs said "I am obviously delighted to see our pupils and staff have achieved this wonderful result and justifiably are recognised as one of the top performing schools in the country."

Academy students opt to spend longer in class in bid to improve

PUPILS at the Strood Academy were given a chance to have a say in how their school was run – and opted to have longer lessons.

The 1,370-pupil academy opened its doors for the first time in September 2009 and pupils had five one-hour lessons every day.

But when asked what they wanted the answer was more.

"It wasn't long enough for the range of activities the children wanted in their lessons," says Richard Hart, the school's headteacher.

"For instance, they couldn't finish their practical activities in science. As a consequence of listening to what they had to say in our first year, we switched to four lessons of a longer duration and now they can finish things like that."

The academy, jointly sponsored by Medway Council and the University of the Creative Arts came following a merger between two single-sex com-

prehensive schools, Chapter Girls' School and Temple Boys' school.

Both were on the Government's "national challenge" hit list of schools that had failed to get 30 per cent of their pupils to obtain five A* to C grade passes including in maths and English.

Four years ago, Temple was at the very bottom of the league tables with just two per cent of its pupils obtaining the benchmark. But since then things have improved massively.

A rise in GCSE passes has led to an increase in the number of youngsters now staying on into the sixth-form.

Previously, Temple Boys' School did not have a sixth form while Chapter Girls' School enrolled around 170 pupils, operating a mixed sixth-form. Now the figure has increased to 240.

"That's a real success story," said Mr Hart. "Part of this is down to the qualifications they now gain at GCSE. Also, there are so few oppor-

tunities on the jobs market for 16-year-olds."

Also the link with the University of the Creative Arts has meant the pupils benefit.

"University students come and work with our students," said Mr Hart. "They do model-making classes with architectural students and fashion students from Rochester have also come here to work with our pupils."

The brightest youngsters from the school's first year also get the chance to go to the university campus and get a taste of life in higher education.

"This is especially useful for youngsters whose parents might not have traditionally aspired for them to go to university," said Mr Hart.

"Every six weeks we get the data and where the children are not making much progress against their learning targets, we can intervene."

"We can intervene very quickly when things go wrong."

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Restoration bid to stop the rot on HMS Victory

■ BY JILL HURST AND NICK AMES

THE most famous ship ever built in Chatham is riddled with rot and being pulled apart by its own weight.

Britain's most celebrated warship, HMS Victory, survived the onslaught of the combined French and Spanish navies at the Battle of Trafalgar.

But the flagship of Lord Horatio Nelson, now faces a new battle.

The 245-year-old ship is leaking, rotten and gradually falling apart, according to maintenance documents and a structural survey.

Much-needed repairs have not been carried out and previous renovation work may have even damaged the HMS Victory's structural integrity.

The reports have been compiled in recent months following surveys of the vessel.

It states the ship-of-the-line is being slowly damaged as it is not adequately supported by the cradle built for it in Portsmouth's naval dockyard.

As a result vast brackets which hold the sides of the ship to the beams which give the vessel its internal framework are working loose and gaps are now visible between the joints and the sides or the beams.

Some joints are no longer attached to the hull at all.

The survey also found that some bolts used to hold the ship's wooden hull in place were removed during previous restoration work and revealed widespread problems with rain water entering the vessel, leading to extensive wood rot.

There are even reports of water leaking into the cabin used by Thomas Hardy, who cap-



FLAGSHIP: HMS Victory, pictured in dry dock in Portsmouth, is in need of restoration to safeguard its future

tained the ship at the Battle of Trafalgar and was with Lord Nelson as he died on board from wounds inflicted in the fighting by a French sharpshooter, firing from the rigging of the Redoubtable.

The maintenance problems facing the ship have emerged as the Government is looking to cut the costs of running it.

Although more than 350,000 people visit the ship every year, HMS Victory remains a serving warship and its basic £1.5 million a year maintenance costs are paid for out of the defence budget.

Admiral the Lord Boyce, a former First Sea Lord and chief of the defence staff who is also Lord Warden of the Cinque Ports, said: "The important thing is that HMS Victory remains."

"She is absolutely iconic, a living, visible

memory of Pax Britannica and how this country gained its great wealth through its maritime trade, as a result of the ruling of the waves by the Royal Navy. It absolutely captures that place in our history."

The vessel was launched in 1765 and enjoyed its finest hour in 1805, at the Battle of Trafalgar, which ushered in more than a century of British supremacy at sea.

It was later used as a depot and a training vessel before being placed in a dry dock for her preservation following a campaign in the 1920s - receiving bomb damage during a Luftwaffe raid in 1941.

An MoD spokesman said: "There is an ongoing programme of repair and investment to ensure that this iconic vessel is preserved for future generations."



END OF SERVICE: Type 22 frigate, HMS Chatham

Sailors to parade as town gets chance to bid frigate farewell

ROYAL Navy sailors will march through the streets of Chatham to mark the retirement of the warship HMS Chatham from active service.

The Strategic Defence and Security Review revealed the frigate would be withdrawn from service and the ship's company will be joined by the Band of the Royal Marines for a parade through the town on Saturday, February 12.

In March 2003 the ship's motto of Up and At 'Em - a former chant of rugby teams in Medway - became the first British warship to fire its guns in anger as part of Operation Telic, when she engaged targets on the Al-Faw Peninsula of southern Iraq. Approximately 60 rounds were fired at targets from her 4.5 inch gun.

HMS Chatham, a Type 22 frigate, has also served in Hong Kong as an escort to the Royal Yacht Britannia and in operations off Sierra Leone.

An MoD spokesman said: "It's just three months since the ship's visit on Remembrance Day when thousands of came to visit her, reflecting the Medway towns' long and happy affection for the Royal Navy."

"Despite the town's naval connections stretching back hundreds of years, this could be last time the Royal Navy will parade through the streets of Chatham."

"It's hoped as many people as possible will be out to give the ship's company a farewell that will be long remembered."



STD: Syphilis bacteria under a microscope

If you think you have been at risk - get tested

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

which is usually passed on through sexual contact with someone who is already infected. Syphilis occurs in three stages - during stage one (primary), highly infectious but painless sores appear on the genitals or around the mouth and anus lasting for between two to six weeks before disappearing.

In stage two (secondary), a skin rash and sore throat can appear and usually disappear within a few weeks. At this point, the infection enters a 'latent' or hidden phase during which symptoms completely disappear for years.

Stage three (tertiary) is the most serious and can cause serious damage to the body.

Medway Maritime Hospital's Genito Urinary Medicine department runs a walk-in service. No appointment is necessary. It is located on level three, green zone, and is open between 9am and 4pm.

If you think you have been at risk - get tested.

Art lovers' chance to get teeth into Childish works

A NEW exhibition of work by Medway poet, writer, artist and musician Billy Childish is being staged in London.

Childish has been described as among the most outstanding figures on the British art scene, while former Poet Laureate, Andrew Motion, once said: "He looks like he's having more fun being a poet than I am."

This new show sees the launch of his latest collection of poetry, alongside a collection of some of his other works on paper.

These include a limited edition artist's book with an extract from his forthcoming novel *God Sends Nuts To People Without Teeth* or *The Stonemason*, and a new series of charcoal and chalk drawings.

It is on at the L13 Light Industrial Workshop - a showcase for art and new writings in Clerkenwell.

Inspirations include spotted elk - the subject of an infamous photograph taken after the massacre of Native Americans by US troops at Wounded Knee.

Childish left secondary education in Chatham at 16 an undiagnosed dyslexic before being refused an interview at the local art school.

He entered the Naval Dockyard at Chatham as an apprentice stonemason. During the following six months he produced some 600 drawings in what he called "the tea huts of hell".



SHOWCASE: Billy Childish will display poetry and new drawings in Clerkenwell exhibition

On the basis of this work he was accepted into St Martin's School of Art to study painting but he refused to paint in the college, preferring to do so at home.

He was expelled for this and other rebellious behaviour before completing the course, but has created a huge body of work.

Childish has recently had exhibitions of his paintings in Berlin, at the Neugerriemschneider, the ICA in London, New York's White Columns and Art Basel, in Switzerland. All received both critical and commercial success.

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Man forged estranged wife's name to set up home with new partner, court told

A FRAUDSTER who used his new partner in place of his estranged wife in a bid to get his hands on a £12,000 loan has been sentenced.

Scheming David Green, of Danson Drive, Hoo Marina Park, took the woman to council offices and even handed in a photo of her as proof of identity.

The 58-year-old also twice forged the signature of his ex – Josephine Green – without her permission.

His scam was rumbled when a housing official saw the passport picture and realised the claim was bogus.

Green was sentenced at Medway Magistrates Court last Tuesday after admitting forging the signature of his former wife to obtain an emergency grant and a further loan to refurbish their one-time marital home at Jasper Avenue, Rochester.

Jonathan Male, prosecuting, said Green

■ BY SIMON ROBINSON

forged his estranged wife's name on two application forms – one for an emergency grant to fix his heating; the other for a loan to fund further home improvements.

The attempted fraud would have cost the council a total of £11,812.

Ironically, had he signed the loan application himself he would have had his heating installed and not committed any crime as only one signature was required.

Robert Weston, defence solicitor for Green, said he had acted out of desperation after failing to make contact with his former partner, whose name remained on the deeds of their house.

Green also admitted falsely claiming council tax benefit and a single person discount on his council tax when he failed to notify Medway council his new partner had moved in.

This charge stretches back to November 2006 when Medway Council received an application for a discount on his council tax stating he was the only adult living at 25 Jasper Avenue.

His new partner had in fact lived there for the previous three years. This led to an overpayment of £1,632.90.

Mr Weston said Green had not deliberately set out to mislead the council about his benefits claims, as his new partner lived part of the week at her mother's home in London.

Magistrates sentenced Green to a Community Order for 12 months, with a requirement to perform 80 hours of unpaid work. He was also ordered to pay costs to the council of £200.

Medway council finance boss, Alan Jarrett, said: "We are determined to stop people defrauding the tax payers of Medway."

"What David Green did was dishonest and I applaud the council's benefits investigation team and the DWP for bringing him to justice."

Can dockyard's past still be felt today?

TWO NEW ghost walks are set to be staged at Chatham Historic Dockyard from next month.

They are connected with two historical stories relating to the Smithery.

In 1866 a steam boiler exploded, killing two men and injuring others. In 1940 a lone German aircraft attacked Chatham and dropped a bomb on the north end of the smithery building. Three men were killed outright and a further two died later from their wounds.

A dockyard spokesman said: "Can the blast from these explosions be felt today? Do the spirits of these men live on in No.1 Smithery today? Is it haunted?"

"Be prepared for the hairs on the back of your neck to stand on end and a chill to go down your spine."



CHILLS AND SPILLS:
Tours of Smithery No.1



JOOLS TO JAZZ UP DUBAI

Musician and TV personality Jools Holland is set to perform at the forthcoming 2011 Dubai International Jazz Festival which starts tomorrow.

The music event runs until February 18 and will feature some of the world's leading names in music. It is expected that the festival will boost the number of fans taking flights to the oil rich Middle Eastern state over the next few weeks.

As well as Jools Holland and his Rhythm and Blues Orchestra, Macy Gray, Alison Moyet, Joshua Radin and Mica Paris are also heading to Dubai to perform.

The first Dubai International Jazz Festival was held in 2003 and has developed into a popular event. Jools – who lives in Cooling Castle – is also set to open a jazz and blues club in Bristol.

Grain terminal part of a 'virtual pipeline'

THE Isle of Grain shipping terminal is growing in importance as a way into the country for vital energy supplies with an increase in the number of massive vessels using the port.

Last week the massive liquefied natural gas (LNG) tanker British Sapphire docked at the terminal, which is the largest in the world outside Japan and South Korea.

Experts at the National Grid say the terminal now forms part of a growing "virtual pipeline" which can ship supplies around the globe to where they are most needed.

And a growing number of energy suppliers are looking at Grain as a port for the UK.

During the recent cold spell a record quar-

ter of all gas used in the UK came from liquefied supplies. And the £1 billion terminal was key to the supplies as it can deal with 9.8 million metric tonnes a year.

The supercooled liquid gas is processed on shore to return to its natural state when it enters the pipelines.

The recently expanded terminal can accommodate five of the supertankers each week.

Major customers are ships sailing from Qatar and Algeria, as well as those taking supplies from Russia via Norwegian ports.

The National Grid estimates as supplies from the North Sea run out, the UK will have to import 70 per cent of its gas from abroad, with two thirds coming from LNG.

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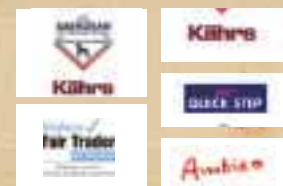
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ARCHANT KOS MEDIA CAMPAIGN ISSUES COUNTYWIDE CALL TO ARMS TO KENT BUSINESSES

Time to roll up our sleeves and work together for prosperity

■ BY STEVE KNIGHT

THIS newspaper calls on employers throughout the county to join together and support our new campaign to Keep Kent Working.

With unemployment at its highest rate in years and Government spending cuts in full force, now is the perfect time for businessmen and women across the region to collaborate and improve the Kent economy for all.

Our campaign aims to keep people in work, generate jobs and develop our talent for the future.

It will provide a forum for local companies to demonstrate what they are doing to aid the recovery – be it by taking on new apprentices or coming up with innovative new ways of working – while also acting as a launch-pad for firms to join together and share their expertise.

Archant KOS Media has faced difficult decisions itself in recent times, as have many businesses within the county.

Managing director Paul Stannard said: "We ourselves have had to make tough decisions, and it is from this backdrop that we decided to



do something positive and use our media as a vehicle for employers and organisations – as well as the wider community – to communicate how adaptable the business community in Kent is to dealing with change and to make sure the people of Kent know what opportunities are out there."

The Keep Kent Working campaign already has the backing of Kent County Council and the Federation of Small Businesses.

"Anything that gets businesses working together to create more employment opportunities for people – and especially young people – absolutely gets my backing," said Kent County Council's cabinet member for regener-

ation and economic development, Cllr Kevin Lynes. "There could be a little more thought between businesses about the beginning and the end.

"I'd like to reach a point where we are engaging really closely with the private sector to find out where the skills gaps will be in future, so we can address that and train up tomorrow's workforce today."

One of the main aims of the Keep Kent Working campaign is to encourage businesses to take on young workers, as a third of the county's unemployed are aged 18-24.

Investing

Cllr Lynes pointed to KCC's support scheme for employers, which drastically reduces the bureaucracy involved with taking on an apprentice, as an example of how different organisations can work together for the benefit of all.

He added: "The benefit of investing in youth is that you get a huge amount of enthusiasm, energy and drive that comes with being young."

"Letting young people look at things with a fresh pair of eyes and question the way in which they do things can be so valuable to businesses, and can give them a serious edge over their competitors."

The Keep Kent Working campaign manager

Claire Trevill, who has vast experience of business in Kent, says she fully understands what employers and employees are going through.

She has worked closely with the Government's Future Jobs Fund and is acting as a business mentor for young people with the Prince's Trust charity.

"Everyone is aware that these are tough economic times, but that creates an opportunity for doing things differently," said Miss Trevill. "And that includes how businesses recruit their staff and how they take on apprentices and offer graduate placements.

"Our proximity to London has also become a blessing and a curse, because we lose many of our best workers there. But now's the time to stop the brain drain and for Kent employers to fight back and keep the talent here.

"Keep Kent Working is a positive campaign and I'm pleased this newspaper is giving employers and employees the platform to communicate good employment practice as well as to raise awareness of what help is out there to keep Kent strong."

To achieve the aims of our campaign we will need everyone to contribute. We may lead the Keep Kent Working initiative, but we also welcome any ideas or suggestions.

• Show your support for Kent's economic prosperity by emailing keepkentworking@kosmedia.co.uk.

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QUESTION & ANSWER

JOHN BAILEY



Q Tell us a little about yourself.

A I'm 59 and took early retirement from a major PLC just over two years ago. I'm married and have two grown-up kids. I live just outside Ashford.

Q When did you first become interested in the First World War and military history?

A My father and all my uncles were in the forces in WWII and I was brought up hearing stories from the war. I acquired my first military item when I was about seven years old. I swapped a Mars bar for a brass Spitfire that a school friend's father had made in the RAF. I've still got it. I became very interested in the First World War after visiting the Somme in the mid 1980s and was amazed by what I saw. I then started researching my two grandfathers' part in the Great War.

Q What inspired you to set up Still in the Trenches in Folkestone?

A I had done a little spare time trading in militaria and felt that Kent needed a five-day-a-week military history shop where people could buy interesting and genuine items at reasonable prices.

Many military collectors' shops have closed as the internet has grown, but I saw a need for people to be able to see and touch things before they buy them. In collecting, condition is very important and many people are often disap-

pointed with things they buy over the internet. I also restore items and will track things down for people. I can sometimes do research into customers' grandfathers' WWI history.

Q Tell us about the flag you recently discovered.

A I bought the flag from a local collector who had acquired it 12-15 years ago. It was made by a French woman in Calais during 1944 to welcome the liberating troops. It's made mainly from parachute silk, plus what looks like the gold edging from a tablecloth. It is quite crudely made. I am investigating a couple of leads on the French woman, but it's early days yet.

Q What are the favourite items in your collection and why?

A I do like military paperwork, such as the documents a soldier would have had in his service from recruitment to discharge. I have those papers for my father and one of my grandfathers and it is far more human than the metalwork and hardware of war. I've also got a lot of Home Guard training manuals and papers. I think the Home Guard was amazing.

Q What kind of items would typically be considered of historic military significance?

A There are many iconic items that come from the two world wars. The Lee Enfield rifle was probably the finest service rifle ever

and has become a classic. It had a British service life of 60 years and is still going strong in India. Similarly the Mills grenade, which was designed in 1915, modified in 1917 and then remained in service for another 55 years completely unchanged. I also think First World War medals are potent symbols of the terrible experiences soldiers had of trench warfare.

Q What do you think of the social and cultural life of the area?

A My wife and I moved to Ashford from south east London four years ago and wished we had done it earlier. The quality of life here is far better, with the superb countryside and coastline. There seem to be many more people actively trying to make Kent a better place.

Q How can people find out more about you and Still in the Trenches?

A They can learn a lot from the website but also I'd like them to come to the shop in the Old High Street, Folkestone. I like to chat with my customers and have had some incredible people in the shop – D-Day veterans, serving soldiers, Blitz survivors, and V1 witnesses. Recently a marvellous lady who was in the French resistance visited the shop.

Q Tell us something that people don't know about you.

A In the mid 1980s I qualified as a pilot and even got to fly a WWII military aircraft.

Q & A

The owner of wartime memorabilia shop Still in the Trenches spoke to **James Alexandre** about his fascination with military history, the significance of a handmade flag and the joys of living in Kent.

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Pupils put under pressure in battle to pass Kent Test

■ BY MARIJKE COX

PARENTS of children as young as five are trying to hire private tutors for 11-plus coaching, as the demand for grammar school places rockets.

Tutors across the county said they had been inundated with calls from parents desperate to start preparing their children, despite the exam, known as the Kent Test, being up to six years away in some cases.

The influx is being blamed on the huge demand for grammar school education. Last September 10,947 youngsters aged 10-11 sat the test for just 4,475 places in the academic year starting in September 2011.

Tutors said competition was fierce and parents were going to extreme lengths to secure their child a place.

Kent and Medway tutor Patricia Matthewman, principle of the Eleven Plus Academy, said year five, aged 9-10, was young enough to start coaching.

"I don't believe starting younger than that is beneficial," she said.

"We have had parents asking for tutoring for younger children and we've turned them away. Some calls were for year three children (7-8) and others even younger, specifically for the 11-plus.

"General tutoring in subjects such as creative writing is fine at any age, but tutoring for the 11-



ALL WORK, NO PLAY: Pupils are being put under too much pressure at an early age, say education experts

plus at a young age does not help.

"I can understand why parents want to do this, but it really is unsuitable. Coaching for 12 months before they take the test is adequate."

Mrs Matthewman said the high demand for grammar school places was pushing parents to try and start tutoring early.

But another Kent tutor, who works in the Maidstone area, said the idea tutoring would secure a grammar school place was misguided.

"It's more about the child. Even the brightest won't always be suitable for grammar schools," she said.

"I've been contacted by parents with children

of five asking for 11-plus tutoring, but it's too young – year five is the right time."

The tutor, who asked not to be named for professional reasons, said: "I've had parents call up about children as young as six. There's a year four girl (aged eight) whose parents asked if she could have in excess of an hour's tutoring, which is too long for someone that age."

Figures from Kent County Council showed 10,947 children sat the Kent Test in September, 2010, to start secondary school in the 2011 academic year.

A spokesman said even if a child passes the exam it does not necessarily mean they will be given a grammar school placement.

"Many grammar schools are their own admissions authority," he said. "KCC cannot guarantee that a grammar-assessed child will be offered a grammar school."

Marian Darke, south east regional secretary of teaching union the NUT, said there was too much pressure being put on children to pass the Kent Test.

"There is more and more pressure to get them through the test, rather than allowing them to enjoy their education," she said.

"It's making it all about succeeding or failing, and this isn't good for children.

"Education should be about developing, not about labelling children who don't go to a grammar school as failures. Tutoring young children puts far too much pressure on them."

New baccalaureate blow to grammars

A CONTROVERSIAL system introduced to boost the number of pupils studying traditional academic subjects has exposed failings in Kent's grammar schools.

League table figures revealed that while selective schools excel in GCSEs, under the English baccalaureate, many are lagging behind.

The qualification is awarded to pupils who achieve five A* to C grades in English, maths, a science, a foreign language, and a humanity.

Schools were previously only judged on the number of pupils who achieve five A* to C grades in any subjects.

While six selective schools in Kent achieved above 80 per cent, others only managed to scrape average scores, and six fell below 50 per cent.

Twenty-eight grammars, however, had 95 per cent or more of their pupils achieving five A* to C grades, including English and maths – Maidstone's Invicta Grammar School achieved 100 per cent for a second consecutive year.

Aside from the baccalaureate results, however, headteachers, staff and pupils were celebrating record GCSE results.

The majority of Kent's secondary schools beat the previous year's results, with the number of students gaining five or more A* to C grades up 6.3 per cent to 79.3 per cent – 3.2 per cent above the national average.

Medway Council was also celebrating record GCSE results, with 77 per cent of pupils achieving five A*-C grades – six per cent up on the previous year.

Gad's Hill School in Higham, near Rochester, was named as the eighth best performing school in England.

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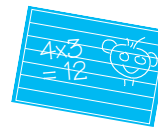
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BREAK TIME



TAKE A BREAK: Students promote their chosen destinations at the mini travel market

Tourism students put careers on map

BUDDING travel agents promoted a range of beach getaways and city breaks at a day-long tourism expo.

The 14 MidKent College students put on the mini travel market as part of their level two diploma in travel and tourism.

They had been given the task of marketing a holiday destination of their choice.

Each junior holiday expert designed a promotional display board to advertise their chosen location and created their own business card and flyer.

Travel student Nis Bandasak said: "We've spent weeks preparing for the event and designing a range of marketing materials. I chose to promote Venice in Italy as it's a great city for a romantic break. I love it there."

Gem's on assignment after winning fashion blog prize

■ BY SIMON ROBINSON

WEB wonder Gem Royston-Claire's online articles have earned her first prize in a top blogging competition.

The 23-year-old fashion promotion student's blog 'Gem Fatale' won Asos magazine's Battle of the Bloggers award.

Her prizes include Hewlett Packard's latest fashionista-friendly netbook, the butterfly-covered Mini 210 Vivienne Tam edition.

Gem also takes up a temporary position as an Asos style blogger, a job which has already taken her to London Fashion Week.

Her blog is also featured in the current edition of Asos magazine.

The UCA Rochester student said she loves writing about style, but hates fashion.

"My favourite fashion discovery has been that I actually don't like fashion," she said.

"It's style that I love, and studying fashion promotion at uni has helped me realise this."

Speaking about her Asos internship, Gem added: "They are sending me on a new fashion assignment every month. At London Fashion Week I had to take pictures of stylish people and report back to Asos blog readers."

"It was great fun, but also nerve-racking. Part of the lure of blogging is that you can do it from the comfort of your sofa, but this prize has forced me

out of my comfort zone and, indeed, out of my flat.

"Reading the judges' comments on the Asos website helped me to believe in myself as a writer. Winning has been a really positive experience for me and I can't wait for my next assignment."

Clare Coughlan, UK Advertising Manager for competition backers Hewlett Packard, was one of the judges sifting through hundreds of entries.

"I loved Gem's writing style – she's funny, upbeat and entertaining," she said.

"Her subject was spot on. Blogs and the internet have broken down many walls, especially in the fashion industry. It was great to read the impact this has had on how she discovers new styles and shares her findings with her followers."

Asos Life content editor Natalie Wall said: "I enjoy Gem's maverick, slightly rebellious subject matter and natural writing style. She strikes me as someone who would not be fazed by the madness of London Fashion Week and approaching people on street style assignments."

Gem, who is originally from Bexhill in East Sussex, gets more than 60,000 hits a month on her style blog, which can be found at www.gemfatale.co.uk.



STYLE GURU: Award-winning blogger Gem Royston-Claire

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your letters



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YOUR LETTERS

Plague of white vans parked across towns

What we really need is something to sort out the explosion of white vans that park on residential streets.

They park on corners, blocking the view of other drivers trying to pull out or pedestrians trying to cross the road, as well as taking up parking spaces which are already in short supply.

Gary, comment posted online at www.yourmedway.co.uk

No truck with works vehicles on streets

It's not just the white vans, it's works vehicles in general that are adding to the problem.

The roads are narrow and parking is limited, but many people bring home works vehicles because the companies don't have anywhere to keep them.

One resident near me even brings home a lorry cab.

A Jones, comment posted online at www.yourmedway.co.uk



DRIVEN MAD: Story at yourmedway.co.uk

Of bloated egos and many other fat cats

Fat cats everywhere need to go on a diet – none more so than the bloated egos of Medway Council's ruling elite – take a look at the 'Say no to Medway city' group on Facebook.

Peter Cook, comment posted online at www.yourmedway.co.uk



BIG PUSS: Story at yourmedway.co.uk

Peninsula should be left to the birds

With reference to the story head-lined Campaigners' fury at plans to bring Cliffe airport back to life (Kent News, January 8).

Mr Olsen is right to say that the Hoo Peninsula includes the best piece of undeveloped land near a major city.

But it is not, and never has been, the best piece of land for an airport. It is best for the amazing range of wildlife and the spectacular, open landscape found there, much of which is legally protected for its international importance.

Plans to build an airport anywhere in the Thames Estuary have been repeatedly rejected, including by the current Government. It's time Mr Olsen, Mayor Johnson and others recognised that just because there's a gap between the houses, it's not appropriate to cover it in runways.

Regeneration in the Thames Estuary may be a crucial fuel for the UK's economic engine, but a powerful engine needs to breathe or it will choke and stall.

I would like to reassure residents on the Hoo Peninsula that the RSPB remains resolute in its commitment to the protection of the



PLANE CRAZY: Story at kentnews.co.uk

unique wildlife and heritage of the north Kent marshes.

Chris Corrigan, regional director
RSPB South East

Meningitis vigilance crucial during winter

I am writing to thank all your readers who supported the Meningitis Trust during 2010.

It's only with the help of local communities that we are able to continue our vital work rebuilding lives shattered by meningitis.

The Meningitis Trust relies entirely on voluntary donations, which means support from individuals, families, schools, nurseries and businesses is fundamental to our survival.

This year we celebrate our 25th anniversary; a quarter of a century

of supporting people as they face life after meningitis.

Meningitis can strike anyone, of any age, at any time. Those who survive can be left with devastating after-effects including loss of hearing, sight, brain damage and, where septicaemia (blood poisoning) has occurred, loss of limbs.

These after-effects last a lifetime and impact all aspects of day-to-day life for the individual as well as their family, friends and colleagues. The Meningitis Trust is dedicated to helping people who have experienced meningitis rebuild their lives through its range of specialist support services.

This time of year is particularly relevant for talking about meningitis as cases of the disease rise in the winter.

The Meningitis Trust urges people to be vigilant of the signs and symptoms and to trust their instincts. Symptoms can include, fever, headache, stiff neck, dislike of bright lights, drowsiness, joint pain, vomiting, diarrhoea and, in some cases but not all, a rash that doesn't fade under pressure.

For more information, call the trust's freephone 24-hour helpline staffed by nurses on 0800 028 18 28 or log on to its website www.meningitis-trust.org. Thank you all once again and best wishes for 2011.

Anne Currie, Meningitis Trust

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Jobless total falls despite downturn

UNEMPLOYMENT fell by 21 per cent in Medway last year, new figures have shown.

The decrease equates to 1,658 fewer claimants of Jobseeker's Allowance across the towns.

At the beginning of 2010, Medway had 7,659 residents claiming the allowance but by the end of the year that figure had fallen to 6,001.

The 21 per cent fall was larger than the national average of 15 per cent during the same period.

Youth unemployment, affecting 18 to 24 year olds, also fell more in Medway than in any other unitary authority across the entire country, dropping 770 to 1,760 – 30 per cent.

This is nearly twice as much as the national average fall of 15.4 per cent and a stronger fall than the regional average of 24 per cent.

Support

Medway Council's economic growth boss, Jane Chitty, said: "In spite of the recession, we refused to allow this to distract us from the real opportunities and we stand by our commitment to support the people of Medway.

"We are determined to help get Medway back to work and while I am delighted at these figures, I accept there is more to be done and we are looking at a range of initiatives to ensure we don't lose momentum.

"Medway Council has responded to the recession by securing funding from central government and ensuring our residents have the services and advice they need to get back into work, whether that be further training, CV advice or personalised support."

Give Flowers deal time to grow, savers urged

■ BY STEVE KNIGHT

THE chief executive of Kent Reliance Building Society has asked its members not to make rash judgements over the £50 million deal with JC Flowers.

A minority of savers who voted against the agreement – which represents the first private-sector investment in the mutual banking sector – claim the business will now no longer be run with their best interests at heart.

JC Flowers, which has offices in New York and London, is a private equity investment firm focused on the financial services industry.

Run by billionaire and Harvard graduate J Christopher Flowers, the firm failed in its attempt to purchase Northern Rock before the bank was saved by the British taxpayer in 2008.

But while admitting his new partners will ultimately want to make a profit, KRBS chief executive Mike Lazenby said it was too early to make predictions about the future of the business.

"We will continue to run as a mutual until JC Flowers owns 90 per cent of the business, which is a long way off," he said.

"They have also agreed not to pay any dividends to investors for the next five years, which



NEW DEAL: But some Kent Reliance savers are worried

is an incredibly long time in business. For example, five years ago we couldn't possibly have imagined the economy would be the way it is today.

"If they decide after five years they want their money back – and it's not been agreed that they will – then that would give us the option to buy them out.

"It's not a given that everything will be over and we'll become a proper bank.

"Five years is a long way off and a lot of things will happen before then. In the meantime we'll be going back to lending people money, which we haven't been able to do for some time, and we'll be offering some pretty good rates."

With assets of more than £2.2 billion, KRBS

is the 12th largest building society in the UK and has served the people of the county for more than 150 years.

At least 75 per cent of KRBS members had to vote in favour of the JC Flowers deal for it to be passed, and it scraped through with 75.8 per cent of the ballot.

The Chatham-based society will now transfer all of its business, assets and liabilities to a new bank called OneSavings, which is expected to become effective on February 1, pending approval from the Financial Services Authority.

In the meantime KRBS has been busy securing eight new branches in towns as far away as Gloucester, Bristol and Devon, which Mr Lazenby says would not have been possible without the £50m investment.

And despite once describing high street branches as "liabilities", he is also looking to expand the business and open more offices on home turf in Kent.

"There will always be people who want to access a high street branch," said Mr Lazenby.

"But we have to make sure they're in the right place and that they will be used when they're open, otherwise they're just a drain on our resources.

"For example, our agency in Strood [at First Call Mortgage Services in the High Street] is totally inappropriate for what we're using it for. But we want to keep a presence in the town so we'll be opening a new office in its place."

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**DAY & NIGHT****Explore your inner flirt**

A BURLESQUE workshop takes place at the Astor Theatre in Deal from 2-3.30pm on Saturday, January 22.

Miss Maybe's monthly classes will increase your confidence and inspire you to get your feathers and sequins out.

Workshops also take place on February 18, March 19 and April 16. No dance experience required, and there is no nudity, but plenty of fun and giggles.

Contact Miss Maybe on 07870343870 for more information.

Sleeping Beauty dates

A PRODUCTION of Sleeping Beauty will delight dance fans at the Churchill Theatre, Bromley, on February 1 and 2.

Founded in 1988 by former Bolshoi soloist and choreographer Victor Smirnov-Golovanov, Moscow City Ballet has become one of Russia's most successful touring companies and their take on the ballet is not to be missed.

Tickets range from £29.50 to £33.50 and are available from www.ambasadortickets.com or by calling the box office on 08448 717 620.

Don't miss TV comic

TOP comic Andy Parsons, of Mock the Week fame, will tickle funnybones when he comes to the Central Theatre in Chatham.

The funnyman is in town on March 17. Tickets are £14 or £16. Book early to avoid disappointment. Call the box office on 01634 338338, or visit www.centraltheatre.co.uk.

Banksy's dramatic joke?

EXIT Through The Gift Shop is a cruelly-entertaining account of street artist Banksy's relationship with a wacky super-fan.

But is this a straightforward documentary about the world of street art, or is the joke on us?

The film shows at The Astor Theatre in Deal on Monday, January 31 at 8pm. Ticket prices are to be announced. Visit www.theastor.org for more details.

Keeping it in the family

THE Floorboard Family will play the Chimney Boy, in Faversham, on February 2.

The Faversham Folk Club gig features family members Francis Kendall, Richard Kilner and Jason Rose. Together they write, sing and play roots, ballads and blues as well as "good time" music.

Entry is £7, or £6 for members. Visit www.favershamfolkclub.net for details.

Dine to best of blues

BLUES Junction present a night of the very best of the blues at Pizza Express, Maidstone, on Saturday.

Starting at 8pm, there will be music from the Blues Junction, band who specialise in blues music from Chicago to Delta to West Coast to British. They cover classics by the likes of Eric Clapton, BB King, Buddy Guy, Muddy Waters, Albert King, Etta James, Howlin' Wolf, and Robert Cray.

Tickets are £15 each from www.pizza-expresslive.com.

Remembering a rock 'n' roll hero

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Tuesday, February 1, to Saturday, February 5
Orchard Theatre, Dartford.



THE world's most successful rock 'n' roll musical has had audiences rocking in the aisles for decades, and it's back in Kent soon.

Buddy – The Buddy Holly Story will come to the Orchard Theatre in Dartford next month, 52 years after the legend's passing and "the day the music died".

That famous phrase was coined by Don McLean, in the song 'American Pie'.

Holly died in a plane crash, but his legacy was already cemented.

That fateful day will forever be ingrained on the memory of Maria Elena, widow of Charles Hardin 'Buddy' Holley (the 'e' was dropped after his name was misspelled on a recording contract).

Each year she commemorates the passing of her husband, who was just 22 when he died, in the same way.

"I pray for Buddy, like I do every night," she begins. "I light a candle, I buy flowers, and stay home. I just remember him as he was when I met him."

The couple had been married less than six months when the small plane carrying Buddy, 17-year-old Ritchie Valens, J.P. 'the Big Bopper' Richardson, 28, and pilot Roger Peterson, 21, plummeted from the night sky into a frozen Iowa cornfield.

Though the 50 years that have passed have dulled some of the pain, the shattering impact of the accident still remains with Maria Elena.

"When Buddy died it was so sudden," she reflects. "Those kinds of deaths are very, very difficult to deal with because you don't have the chance to say goodbye."

The circumstances surrounding Buddy's inclusion on the Winter Dance Party Tour of 1959 only add to the sense of tragedy.

"He left home against my will, I was pregnant," she says. "He said 'it will be a short tour – I just can't continue without getting my own money to do what we're planning to do.' We had plans to open record companies and our own publishing company, and Buddy also wanted to develop new artists, even at that time."

To commemorate this special occasion, the smash-hit West End musical Buddy – The Buddy Holly Story will be rocking The Orchard, Dartford, with a performance on the anniversary of Buddy's death, proving that the music, like Buddy's legacy, lives on.

Maria Elena Santiago was 25 when she and Buddy married in August 1958, less than two months after they first met.

Folklore has it that Maria Elena had a premonition about the crash before he left for the tour.

"Absolutely, as a matter of fact we were both dreaming," she confirms.



"Buddy had a dream about leaving me on top of a building and I dreamed about a comet, this great ball of fire coming down. It came past me and made a hole in the ground. I could see the fire coming out of that hole."

"The day after (Buddy) was leaving and I was packing for both of us, but he said 'I told you, I can't bring you with me, you're pregnant.'"

Having discovered news of the crash on tel-

evision, Maria Elena says she fell into a "catatonic state", unable to digest what had happened. She miscarried soon after.

The show has been a worldwide smash, and recalls the heyday of the legendary Holly.

All the hits are here and tickets will sell fast. Tickets, priced between £20 and £27.50 each, are available from www.orchardtheatre.co.uk, or by calling the box office on 01322 220000.



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THE NEW SQUADRONAIRES

Friday, February 4, Woodville Halls, Gravesend

DO YOU remember the original Squadronaires from the 1940s?

Officially known as the No 1 RAF Dance Band, the musicians soon adopted the unofficial name 'The Squadronaires' and went on to win the prestigious Melody Maker award for five consecutive years. Their successors will enthral at this show in Gravesend.

Originally formed by the RAF, with a view to emulating the popularity with the troops of the American bands of the day, and to help boost morale, the Squadronaires went on to surpass even the most popular of the American bands. The orchestra was reformed under

the leadership of trumpet player Greg Francis (the bandleader of the Memphis Belle Swing Orchestra and the movie Memphis Belle) and a change of presentation and musical content was made.

Based on, and as a tribute to, the wartime orchestra, the band consists of young musicians, looking as they did then, and playing the swing music of the era, including Glenn Miller Tommy Dorsey Harry James Benny Goodman Artie Shaw and more.

The show starts at 8pm. Tickets are £15, or £13 for concessions. To book, call the box office on 01474 337774.



THE THREE DEGREES

Friday, January 28, Central Theatre, Chatham

THE Three Degrees can't wait to see you again.

The longest-running line-up of the group comes to Chatham this month to wow audiences with a full playlist of their hits.

Once famously known as Prince Charles's favourite group, the trio will delight fans eager to hear their music again.

Boasting more than 40 years in the business and with some timeless classics in their repertoire, their best-known hit, When Will I See You Again? will no doubt feature on the evening.

The Three Degrees were formed in about 1963 in

Philadelphia and were discovered by producer and songwriter Richard Barrett, who was responsible for groups of the 1950s such as The Chantels, Little Anthony and the Imperials, and The Valentines.

Over a long career, the group slowly found their way to the top, really making their mark in the 70s and 80s with mainstream chart success.

The tour line-up is Cynthia Garrison, Valerie Holiday and Helen Scott. Tickets for the show are £19 or £21.50 each. Call 01634 338338 to book, or visit www.whatsonmedway.co.uk.



ROY CHUBBY BROWN

Wednesday, January 26,
The Orchard Theatre, Dartford



OFFENSIVE, controversial and hugely successful, Roy Chubby Brown is touching down in Dartford.

The flying hat and goggles-wearing Northerner has put more bums on seats than most other comics, and has one of the most devoted fanbases in the laughter business.

His ribald live routines are blue and draw huge crowds, no matter what town he's in.

Few subjects are deemed too sensitive to be touched on, and the language will be blue.

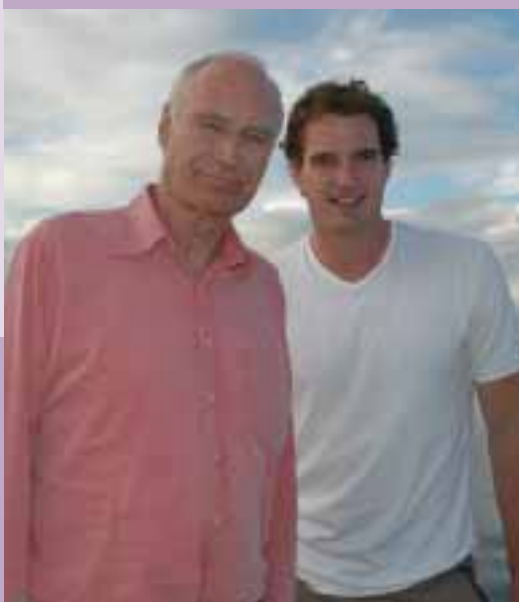
Get set for a barnstorming night of banter, hilarious mickey-taking and humour from Britain's most outrageous comedian, who uses a non-stop battering ram of jokes and tales during his shows.

You'll be in the presence of one of the scenes biggest characters but it's not for the easily offended.

The tour ends in April, but this is Chubby's only date in Kent. Tickets are £22.50 each from www.orchardtheatre.co.uk, or call 01322 220000.

Bookings of over 40 people will receive a free finger buffet, but call 01322 220000 for information.

The show starts at 7.30pm and is not suitable for children.



AN AUDIENCE WITH PETER AND DAN SNOW

Sunday, January 30,
The Orchard Theatre, Dartford



FATHER and son team Peter and Dan Snow have established themselves as two of the country's most watchable historians, with their popular TV shows.

Following the success of their books and popular television series, Battlefield Britain and 20th Century Battles, they present an entertaining evening as they discuss highlights and take audience questions.

Dan is Peter's youngest son and the pair have forged a close relationship presenting the shows since 2003.

Battlefield Britain looked at the massive battles that have shaped Britain's history, from Boudicca's destructive rebellion against the Romans to the incredible feats of The Few who saw off the Luftwaffe.

The show received a BAFTA and was shown on the BBC to great acclaim. The 20th Century Battles show which followed made them even more well-known.

Peter Snow was already a familiar face to viewers, due to his exploits as a Newsnight presenter and election specialist.

The show starts at 7.30pm. For tickets call the box office on 01322 220000.

MARC ANTOINE AND PAUL BROWN

Friday, January 28, Pizza Express, Maidstone



THIS pair join the impressive roll-call of those who have played at Pizza Express in the last few months.

Playing songs from last year's Foreign Exchange joint album, Marc Antoine is well known to regulars, and Paul, aside from his solo musical projects, is also one of the leading producers in the smooth jazz world.

He is responsible for number one hits for various artists, including Pizza Express favourite Peter White.

Both men are excellent guitarists with a broad repertoire.

Marc Antoine has performed in the past with Basia, SoullISoul, Guru's Jazzmatazz, The Solsonics, Queen Latifah, acid jazz DJ GreyHoy, Rick Braun, Sting and the late Selena.

Paul Brown is the producer per se in the smooth jazz genre. He has performed with Al Jarreau, Boney James, Jeffery Osborne, Kirk Whalum, Larry Carlton, George Benson, Patti Austin and many more.

Paul and Marc will be joined by Oli Silk on keyboards, Otto Williams on bass and Tony Mason on drums.

The show is at 8pm. Tickets are £25 from www.pizzaexpresslive.com.





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Doctors are not able to remove such unsightly and unwanted moles, lumps and bumps on the face or any part of the body, as they are either too busy or do not have the skills to perform such procedures.

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Aesthetic Face, Churchill Clinic, 94 Churchill Ave, Chatham, Kent, ME5 0DL. www.aestheticface.co.uk. Telephone 0845 6019982



Trust and respect vital, says tattooist



■ Kingswood Tattooists

MOBI King has been in the tattoo industry for more than 10 years, and set up shop in Rainham at the beginning of 2010. The studio has been at the location for about seven months.

He said: "Whatever any customer wants, I need to see them to understand what they want, and if I feel the idea is rubbish I won't do it - my tattoos are an advertisement of my work."

An apprentice, Sam, is currently working at the studio and a website will be up shortly.

"We work on a one-to-one basis to ensure we cater to the customer's exact needs," said Mobi. "That way the confidence and respect between tattooist and client can be maintained."

He said: "My friends used to use a tattooist in Gillingham, which is no longer there. He put up his prices so my friends, knowing my history in art and tattoos, bought a starter kit for tattooing and it all went from there."

"I did four years of art courses, including a foundation course at York."

"I'm good at doing it, and I will design your tattoos to your own specification, or I can take a reference picture and turn it into a tattoo. I can also do tattoos from photos."

"I and my business are fully council-registered, and government-licensed."

"I always apply the personal touch, and I always ensure there is trust and respect between clients and tattooist."

Kingswood Tattoo Studio, 47A High Street, Rainham, Kent, ME8 7HS. Telephone 01634 374021

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MOTORS NEWS



What Car? Top Car is A1

AS BEFITS its model description, Audi's new A1 premium hatchback has landed the What Car? Magazine's prestigious Car of the Year title.

Now posing a real challenge to the BMW Mini, What Car? editor-in-chief Steve Fowler said: "The A1 is brilliantly targeted and brilliantly executed."

"More and more buyers are looking for smaller, more efficient cars, but with all the luxury trappings of much larger cars. That's exactly what Audi has given them – a super-stylish, high quality small car that's affordable and great fun, too."



Hyundai plays three door trick with coupé

IT HAS been two years since Hyundai bowed out of the coupé market.

So a new coupé glamour car was well overdue and we'll get one later this year.

It's more than striking to look at too, because the new Veloster will have a unique three-door configuration – two main side doors and one rear side door for easier access to the rear seats, plus disguised exterior handle to maintain the coupé look.

It will be offered with a twin-clutch auto/manual transmission option.



Seat refusing to jump on the VAT bandwagon

SPANISH marque Seat is blowing away New Year gloom with an extended VAT-free offer and VAT cuts, despite the UK tax rising to 20 per cent.

Various offers run until March 31 and are even available to small vehicle fleets as well as private buyers.

The VW-owned marque is pointing out too that Kent commuters into London can benefit from ultra-low emission and road tax exempt Ibiza and Leon E Ecomotive versions escaping the daily Congestion Charge for the capital – newly hiked from £8 to £10.



GREEN MACHINE: The Mitsubishi Colt Cleartec is more refined and quieter than its predecessor and offers further proof of the Japanese brand's development in the eco-friendly stakes

Mitsubishi gives green light with Colt Cleartec

ROAD TEST MITSUBISHI COLT CLEARTEC

■ BY STEVE LOADER

STAR QUALITY

Driving appeal	★★★★★
Image	★★★★★
Space	★★★★★
Value	★★★★★
Running costs	★★★★★
Reliability	★★★★★
Green rating	★★★★★

or a more upright five-door mini-MPV.

The latter in 94bhp 1.3 CZ2 Cleartec form is our test car and looks great value at £10,599.

In addition to keen pricing and Auto Stop & Go savings, you also gain economy and reduced emissions from low rolling resistance tyres, a higher top gear, improved alternator and lower viscosity oil.

These add up to just 119g/km of CO2 emissions or the lowest payable road tax band (£30/year) and average mpg in the mid-50s for the Cleartec.

You don't feel compromised by the eco features either; the Cleartec accelerates faster than its conventional sister model, no doubt helped by the narrower and harder tyres, and the car handles tidily on a windy road.

Mind you, acting the fool in this eco-friendly car exposes the Colt's slightly jittery ride, but this is a rare complaint. The car is more refined and quieter than before too, after intensive sound absorption work.

The revamp has cost some versatility after replacement of the folding/removable rear seats by a conventional fixed/fold flat arrangement, but this delivers more boot space without compromising head and leg room.



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**(05) 05 MODUS 1.5 Dci
86 DYNAMIQUE EURO 4**

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- 02 52 Peugeot 206 1.6 Coupe Convertible, 59,000 miles, FSH, AC, ABS, PAS, RCL, Immob, ER, EV, CD, Leather, Alloys, Met Blue £4,295

HATCHBACKS

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147, TS LUSSO, 2002, abs brakes alloy wheels cruise control electric windows immobiliser power steering, iridescent nuvola blue, 40000 miles, £2500, Canterbury, 0844 856 4494 (TRADE)

147, TS TURISMO, 2008, abs brakes air conditioning alarm fitted alloy wheels cd player central locking climate control drivers airbag electric windows front fog lights full service history immobiliser metallic paint split folding rear seats sports seats trip computer curtain airbags remote central locking isofix child seat points remote adjustable steering column rear headrests 3x3 point rear seat belts heated door mirrors height adj drivers seat space saver spare wheel, red, 14500 miles, £6300, Ramsgate, 0844 856 4496 (TRADE)

147, TS LUSSO, 2002, abs brakes alloy wheels cruise control electric windows immobiliser power steering, iridescent nuvola blue, 40000 miles, £2500, Ashford, 0844 826 5918 (TRADE)

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AUDI

A3, 2.0T FSI S LINE DSG, 2006, abs brakes alarm fitted alloy wheels drivers airbag electric windows front fog lights immobiliser leather interior multiple airbags power steering sports seats column body coloured bumpers rear headrests 3x3 point rear seat belts heated door mirrors height adj drivers seat space saver spare wheel, grey, 84428 miles, £8750, Ashford, 0844 826 5918 (TRADE)

A3, 1.6, 2010, abs brakes air conditioning alloy wheels cd player electric windows immobiliser metallic paint multiple airbags power steering traction control remote central locking, silver, 8367 miles, £15000, Ramsgate, 0844 856 4496 (TRADE)

A3, 2.0 TDi 170 SE 3dr S Tronic, 2006, abs brakes alarm fitted alloy wheels cd player cruise control traction control remote central locking heated door mirrors height adj drivers seat, pearl moro blue, 24000 miles, £10495, Ashford, 0844 826 5918 (TRADE)

A3, TFSI Black Edition(Plus Motorparks Pack and Del), 2009, abs brakes alarm fitted alloy wheels drivers airbag electric windows immobiliser multiple airbags power steering single cd player traction control remote central locking, white, 15305 miles, £18000, Ashford, 0844 826 5918 (TRADE)

A3, 2.0 tdi se, 2006, abs brakes air conditioning alarm fitted alloy wheels cd player central locking diesel electric windows immobiliser metallic paint power steering traction control twin airbags remote central locking adjustable steering column front armrest body coloured bumpers rear headrests 3x3 point rear seat belts heated door mirrors height adj drivers seat, silver, 59000 miles, £9000, Canterbury, 0844 856 4494 (TRADE)

A3, Sport (Plus Motorparks Pack and Delivery), 2003, abs brakes alloy wheels drivers airbag electric windows immobiliser power steering single cd player, silver, 68000 miles, £8000, Canterbury, 0844 856 4494 (TRADE)

A3, SE FSI, 2006, air conditioning alarm fitted cd player central locking electric windows full service history metallic paint multiple airbags remote central locking, mauve met. 24500 miles, £9500, Canterbury, 0844 856 4494 (TRADE)

A3, Sport (Plus Motorparks Pack and Delivery), 2006, abs brakes alloy wheels drivers airbag electric windows immobiliser multiple airbags power steering single cd player remote central locking, blue, 35000 miles, £10000, Canterbury, 0844 856 4494 (TRADE)

A3, SE FSI, 2006, air conditioning alarm fitted cd player central locking electric windows full service history metallic paint multiple airbags remote central locking, mauve met. 24500 miles, £9500, Maidstone, 08448 759296 (TRADE)

BMW

1 SERIES, 1200 M Sport 2.0, 2010, abs brakes air conditioning alarm fitted alloy wheels automatic transmission cd player diesel drivers airbag body coloured bumpers height adj drivers seat, titanium silver, 2539 miles, £23000, Ramsgate, 0844 856 4496 (TRADE)

1 SERIES, 120SPORT, 2005, abs brakes air conditioning alloy wheels cd player central locking diesel electric windows full service history half leather trim metallic paint, met blue, 110000 miles, £7000, Ramsgate, 0844 856 4496 (TRADE)

1 SERIES, 118D ES 2.0, 2007, abs brakes air conditioning alarm fitted alloy wheels cd player diesel drivers airbag electric windows front fog lights full service history immobiliser metallic paint trip computer remote audio controls body coloured bumpers 3x3 point rear seat belts height adj drivers seat, titanium silver, 15629 miles, £12000, Ramsgate, 0844 856 4496 (TRADE)

1 SERIES, 116i SE, 2005, abs brakes air conditioning alloy wheels cd player electric windows immobiliser metallic paint multiple airbags power steering f deactivation switch remote central locking isofix child seat points adjustable steering column 3x3 point rear seat belts height adj drivers seat, grey, 59000 miles, £7000, Ramsgate, 0844 856 4496 (TRADE)

1 SERIES, 116i SPORT, 2006, abs brakes alloy wheels cd player electric windows front fog lights immobiliser metallic paint power steering remote central locking remote audio controls, blue, 24123 miles, £9000, Ramsgate, 0844 856 4496 (TRADE)

1 SERIES, 120d Sport, 2006, abs brakes alloy wheels drivers airbag electric windows immobiliser multiple airbags power steering single cd player traction control front parking sensors, black, 44450 miles, £11000, Ashford, 0844 826 5918 (TRADE)

1 SERIES, SE STEP AUTO, 2005, abs brakes air conditioning alloy wheels automatic transmission diesel electric windows power steering, solid japan red, 46400 miles, £8200, Ashford, 0844 826 5918 (TRADE)

1 SERIES, 320 SE, 2006, abs brakes alarm fitted alloy wheels cd player central locking climate control diesel drivers airbag electric windows full service history immobiliser power steering, black, 62000 miles, £8500, Ashford, 0844 826 5918 (TRADE)

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PROPERTY NEWS

Winter brings call to go online to cut bills

HOMEOWNERS using online energy plans are paying £140 a year less on average for heating and hot water and £229 less on total bills than customers on standard tariffs, according to new research by uSwitch.com

The news comes as UK families face higher energy prices and one of the coldest winters in a century, with each cold snap adding about £7 a week on to fuel bills.

However, while the typical household now faces an annual energy bill of £1,239 a year – up 3.8 per cent from September 2010 – online customers are typically paying £229 a year less for their total energy bills.

Tom Lyon, energy expert at uSwitch.com, said: “When winter fuel bills start to hit doormats consumers could be in for a nasty shock. They will be facing the combined impact of winter price rises along with a potential £7 a week additional cost caused by severe cold weather.

“The concern is that many will react by cutting down on heating and hot water, whereas they could cut the cost of these essentials by £140 a year by moving online.”

Mr Lyon added that online energy plans are “consistently the most competitive” on the market.

Owners 'improving homes for the future'

DIY HOME improvements among Britain's property owners are fast approaching an all-time high, one expert has said.

Anna-Marie DeSouza, editor of Build It Magazine, said new DIY books, TV shows and celebrities had helped make renovations and interior design more fashionable and accessible.

“Now more than ever before, people are enjoying spending their time and money improving their home,” she said.

Meanwhile, a recent HSBC survey revealed that Brits are now more likely to ‘make do and mend’ than they were 12 months ago.

According to the research, 50 per cent of homeowners would seek a repair estimate on a broken household appliance, rather than splashing out on a replacement.

Ms DeSouza added that UK households are currently “investing in their homes” in an effort to “future-proof” their property for years to come.



Buyers' confidence low as uncertainty continues

■ BY NICK AMES

A SURVEY of 5,287 homeowners by online property website Zoopla.co.uk has revealed housing market confidence is at a two-year low.

Despite this, more than half – 54 per cent – of those questioned said they expect house prices to rise over the first six months of 2011.

But this is down from the 81 per cent reported this time last year.

The website's housing market sentiment survey found that the number of homeowners who expect property prices to fall over the six-month period is currently at one in three, up from one in four last quarter.

Meanwhile, those surveyed expect house prices to grow by 1.9 per cent over the six-month period, down from an expected three per cent rise three months ago.

Many experts have predicted that the housing market will remain subdued in 2011, due to uncertainty surrounding the economy and the ongoing mortgage rationing by lenders.

The recent weather has also been bad news for the market.

December's heavy snowfall had a negative impact on many companies and housebuilder Persimmon was no exception.

The housebuilder, which is the UK's second largest by market value, said sales activity fell by 50 per cent in December, but said it had seen an encouraging start to the year.

The company reported a considerable increase in underlying profits for 2010, after turnover rose by 10 per cent to £1.57 billion.

Furthermore, completions were up to 9,384 in 2010 – compared with 8,976 the previous year.

Commenting, the company said: “It is too early in the New Year to assess the likely outcome of the forthcoming spring sales season.

“However, we believe that prospective purchasers who may have postponed visits to our



developments due to the harsh weather conditions prior to the year-end, will return during the coming weeks.”

In related news, the Halifax revealed UK house prices fell by 1.3 per cent last month compared with November.

The latest house price fall takes the average cost of a UK home to £162,435, the Halifax said.

According to the lender, which is part of the Lloyds Banking Group, house prices are now 1.6 per cent lower than a year ago.

Parents can borrow to help kids move out

HOUSEBUILDER Barratt is aiming to help kick-start the housing market by launching a scheme that allows parents to borrow money to get their children on to the property ladder.

The initiative with Hitachi Capital (UK) PLC is designed to tackle the problems faced by young people who cannot secure mortgages without massive deposits.

The company announced the planned scheme in a trading update that showed its

average selling prices jumped by about six per cent to around £176,000 from July to December last year.

It completed 4,832 sales, down from 5,053 in the same period a year earlier, with almost three in 10 sales using shared equity schemes such as the Government's HomeBuy Direct initiative.

Barratt expects sales to be about £875m for the six months, slightly up on last year's

£872.4m, but its operating margin has doubled to five per cent.

Chief executive Mark Clare said: “The group has delivered a significant improvement in both average selling prices and operating margin, even though sales volumes have been affected by difficult trading conditions.

“We are on course to make further progress as we open new higher margin sites and continue to be value and quality-focused.”

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- NOT FOR PROFIT, CHARITIES
- NURSING, MEDICINE, CARE WORK
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- PUBLIC SECTOR, SOCIAL SERVICES
- RETAIL, WHOLESALE, SALES
- SCIENTIFIC AND PHARMACEUTICAL, RESEARCH
- TRANSPORT, LOGISTICS, AVIATION

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Westlands Academies Trust



The Westlands School

Westlands Avenue, Sittingbourne, Kent ME10 1PF

Following the success of the initiative to reduce the number of hours that a teacher has to spend covering for absent colleagues we require as soon as possible another

LESSON SUPERVISOR

This post is designed to provide supervision of classes in the absence of the subject teacher or form tutor. The job is not a teaching role but will require good classroom management skills as well as a confident personality, a good presence and excellent communication skills.

Applicants should be well educated, preferably to further education level, and have experience of giving support in the classroom, preferably as a Teaching Assistant, although other qualifications and personal/work experiences will be taken into account.

Employment will start after a one-week paid in-service training course.

There will be a six-month probationary period.

8.25am - 3.20pm with 1 hour unpaid breaks, term time only plus 1 staff training day and 25 days paid holiday a year, or as relevant to years of service in a similar post.

Salary starting at £16,793 rising to £18,471 (pro-rata) (equal to £12,516 - depending on experience)

Recruitment packs are available from the school or online.
Please note, we cannot accept CVs without an application form.
Closing date: Monday 24th January 2011

The Westlands School is committed to safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children and young people and expects all staff and volunteers to share this commitment.

This post is subject to an enhanced CRB check.

Tel: 01795 477475 Fax: 01795 479461

Email: swa@westlands.kent.sch.uk

Headteacher: J Whitcombe MA

Westlands Academies Trust Company No 7344732



THE SPENCER WING

The Spencer Wing is the independently owned and managed 22 bed private hospital situated on the QEOM Hospital site. We also have a 4 bed unit at the William Harvey Hospital in Ashford. The continuing growth of our business has resulted in vacancies for the following staff:

Staff Nurse (Margate)

Full and part-time positions available
Closing date for applications - Monday 31st January 2011

Qualifications

Registered Nurse 1st Level
Evidence of continual professional development
ENB 998 Teaching and Assessing Course or equivalent (desirable)

To discuss these opportunities or to arrange an informal visit, please contact
Liz Justice - 01843 234555 Ext: 62207

For job description and application form please contact:
Jo Edwards, East Kent Medical Services Ltd, The Spencer Wing
QEOM Hospital, Ramsgate Road, Margate, Kent CT9 4BG
Telephone: 01843 234556 Fax: 01843 296333
E-mail: jo.edwards@thespencerwing.com

The Spencer Wing is an equal opportunity employer
These positions are subject to a Criminal Records Bureau Disclosure check



COMMERCIAL MANAGER

An experienced Commercial Manager is required to head up our team of estimators working as a specialist subcontractor in the social housing refurbishment sector.

With contract values up to £6.5 million pa, candidates must be able to demonstrate expertise, flair and innovation in the preparation of Tenders, PQQ's and managing and assisting in Partnering Submissions for RSL's and Local Authorities as well as liaising closely with the commercial sales team and assisting with job cost feedback.

Based at the company's Head Office in Ramsgate, Kent, there will be a requirement for visits to sites and meetings with clients. Offered is a salary appropriate to your experience, together with contributory pension scheme.

Please apply in writing to Mr Ron Twyman
Planning Manager, 140 Newington Road,
Ramsgate, Kent, CT12 6PP or
e-mail ron@piperwindows.co.uk



New Year, New Challenge!

Due to continued growth, **Family Homes** are seeking a **LETTINGS ADMINISTRATOR**

ideally with relevant lettings experience, excellent people and administrative skills are required as is the need to be able to work on own initiative. F/T or P/T to be discussed.

Send your CV to: sunil.popat@virgin.net

WEEKEND DOMESTIC ASSISTANT

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9 - 2 pm.

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01795 532629 between 10 - 4 pm



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Assistant Manager

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in Folkestone**

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Must have minimum NVQ Level 3 qualification, and experience in caring for the elderly is essential.

Please call Miss Julia Carter (Home Manager) on 01303 254019 for further details or email CV to cumbria@ashwoodhealthcare.co.uk
Subject to satisfactory CRB Check

SENIOR HR OFFICER

An exciting and challenging new position is available for the post of Senior HR Officer.

This person is required to lead the HR team in developing and delivering a comprehensive, high quality HR service for the college, which employs around 400 staff.

Providing employment advice and guidance you will lead on policies and procedures ensuring that best HR practice is in place.

Salary: **£34,817**

Closing date: **20th January 2011**

For further details and to apply online please visit our website www.thanet.ac.uk and click on 'Vacancies'. Alternatively contact the HR Office, Thanet College, Ramsgate Road, Broadstairs, Kent, CT10 1PN or telephone our application line for an application pack on (01843) 605052

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Career opportunities at MidKent College

MidKent College based in the Medway Towns and Maidstone are seeking to appoint an outstanding individual in the following area:

Lecturer in Beauty Therapy

Ref: M0210

Maternity Cover

Salary: £25,181 - £28,963 (dependent on qualifications and experience)
Medway

The College is currently looking to recruit a dynamic and enthusiastic Lecturer in the Beauty Department to deliver high quality training and assessment procedures to full and part time learners. The applicants must have a relevant vocational/academic qualification and have or be willing to work towards a teaching qualification. Recent industry experience would be advantageous.

CLOSING DATE: 12pm noon on Friday 21 January 2011

MidKent College is working in partnership with RBLI Employment Solutions to support individuals who have a disability or health condition in the application, interview and employment with the college. If you would like any further information regarding RBLI, or require assistance with your application process then please contact RBLI on 0800 783 1144 or visit their website www.rbli.co.uk for information, advice and guidance.

The College is committed to safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children and young people and expects all staff and volunteers to share this commitment. Any offer of employment is subject to a Criminal Records Bureau check in accordance with the College procedure.

Application forms and further details are available from www.midkent.ac.uk. Alternatively, please e-mail job.applications@midkent.ac.uk. For individuals without access to e-mail or the internet please call the HR department on 01634 383102 (24 hour answer machine). In all communication with the College please quote the appropriate job title and reference number.

MidKent College is an equal opportunities employer



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Required

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Position part-time. Varied hours.

Own transport is necessary due to location

For more information contact Sally Brooks

Tel: 01795 886220 or email:
ellenscourt@btconnect.com

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Exciting direct sales opportunities with a major retailer of garden buildings in the South-East specialising in log cabins. Why not develop a new career with an expanding company in a growth sector selling this desirable and fashionable product.

All applicants would preferably have English language and basic mathematics equivalent to GCSE grade level C or higher. Candidates will require a basic knowledge of construction techniques applicable in this market sector and have the strong communication skills essential for dealing with the general public. Basic IT and administrative skills beneficial.

Some weekend work required, own transport essential. Full training provided to successful candidates. Between 30-48 hours per week.

Trainee Sales Assistants circa £15,000 per annum, full-time Sales Assistants on target earnings of £25,000 per annum according to level.

Please send CV with self-addressed envelope and detailed information on relevant experience to:

Human Resources, Johnson's Leisure Ltd, Old Thanet Way, Chestfield, Kent CT5 3JD.

Or email sales@needextraspaces.co.uk.

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We believe and pride ourselves in good customer service, professional marketing solutions and excellent business relationships. We provide innovative ideas that will in return give our clients real value and response.

Looking after and growing an existing customer base along with finding new business will form the basis of the job role. You will need to be a self motivated individual with sales experience, good communicator, tenacious and hard working to succeed in this environment.

Telephone Sales Executives (Maternity Cover)

Fixed term 12 months

If you are highly driven, confident, a self motivated team player with good communication skills, who is able to work under pressure to deadlines and targets, in our fast paced and fun telesales department, then apply.

You will be office based and working with an existing client base of advertisers where customer service is paramount, but you must also be able to search out new business to develop and grow your territory revenues and opportunities.

We believe and pride ourselves in good customer service, professional marketing solutions and excellent business relationships. We provide innovative ideas that will in return give our clients real value and response.

Media experience is not essential as full training will be given.

We offer an excellent basic salary plus generous bonus scheme, ongoing training and career development, five weeks' annual leave, contributory pension and life assurance scheme (after qualifying period) and all the benefits of working for a large media organisation.

Please apply in writing with your CV and covering letter in the first instance to:

Ynez Coton, Commercial Director,
ARCHANT KOS MEDIA

Apple Barn, Hythe Rd, Smeeth, Ashford Kent. TN25 6SS
Or email ynnez.coton@kosmedia.co.uk

Media Sales Executives (Business to Business)

We have an opportunity for highly motivated people to create and sell multi-media solutions in our market-leading portfolio of newspapers and magazines.

We're not looking for people to just take orders; we're looking for people who can provide first class solutions for our customers.

We believe good customer service is at the heart of our success and we want to recruit people who can develop excellent business relationships and present effective and innovative ideas that will provide real value and response for our customers.

Telephone Sales Executives x2

You will play the key role in selling advertising across our market leading portfolio of newspapers, websites and mobile products.

Candidates may possess a track record in telephone sales, combining excellent communication skills, tenacity and the ability to build relationships.

Ultimately, we need an articulate and assured sales person with a structured and positive manner.

Your might also be looking to enter media as a career within sale and this would be an excellent starting point.

We offer an excellent basic salary plus generous bonus scheme, ongoing training and career development, five weeks' annual leave, contributory pension and life assurance scheme (after qualifying period) and all the benefits of working for a large media organisation.

Please apply with your CV and covering letter in the first instance to:

Christine Davidson, Commercial Director

ARCHANT KOS MEDIA,

Apple Barn, Hythe Road, Smeeth, Ashford, Kent TN25 6SS

Or by email christine.davidson@kosmedia.co.uk

ARCHANT KOS MEDIA

Flexi Day Care Assistants

Required For Residential Care Home in Folkestone

We are looking to recruit staff with relevant experience and a minimum of NVQ level 2. Experience caring for the elderly is essential.

Please call Miss Julia Carter (Home Manager) on 01303 254019 for further details or email CV to cumbriahouse@ashwoodhealthcare.co.uk

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PUBLIC NOTICE

PUBLIC NOTICE

Notice is hereby given that **Sudha Patel**

Of **156 High Street Gillingham Kent ME7 1AJ**

Has applied to Medway Council, Gun Wharf, Dock road Chatham Kent ME4 4TR for the VARIATION of an off licence application

Hours for sale of alcohol: Monday to Sunday 6am until 11pm

For the premises **Jerry Nests**

Situated at: **156 High Street Gillingham Kent ME7 1AJ**

Interested parties can make written representations to Medway Council Gun Wharf Dock Road Chatham ME4 4TR or view my application by contacting the Council on 01634 337 107 or 01634 337 108 by **11th February 2011**

It is an offence to knowingly or recklessly to make a false statement in connection with a Licence Application and the maximum fine for which a person is liable on summary conviction is £5,000.

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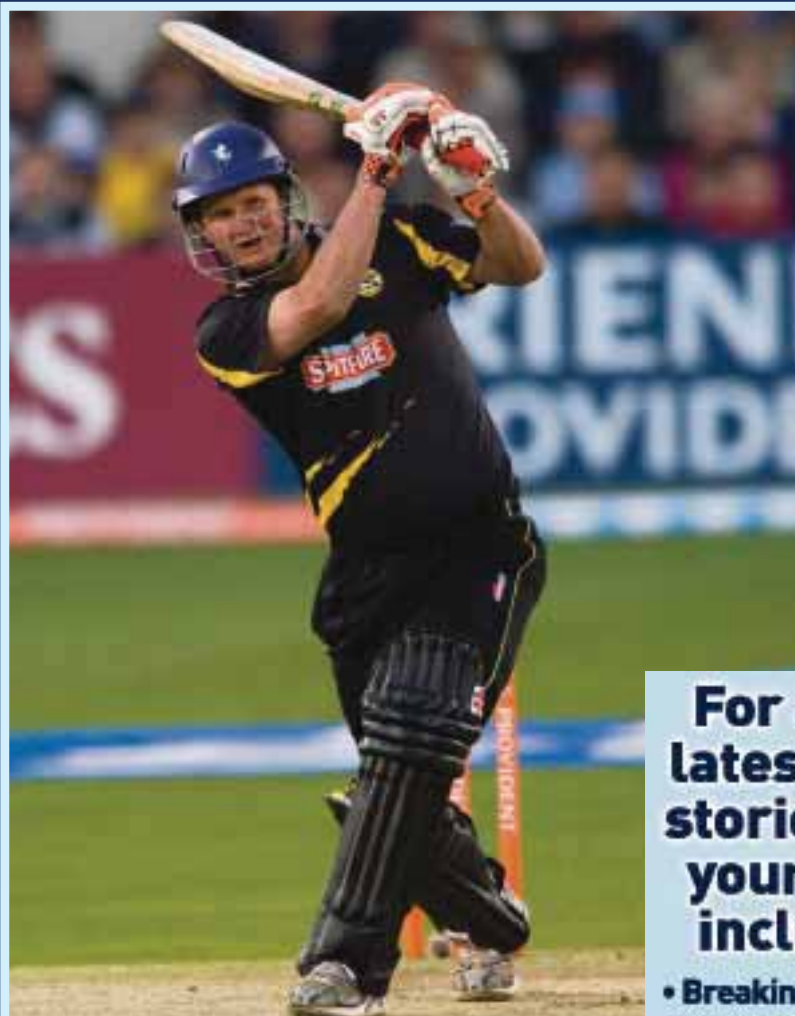
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Why the independent trader is more important than ever

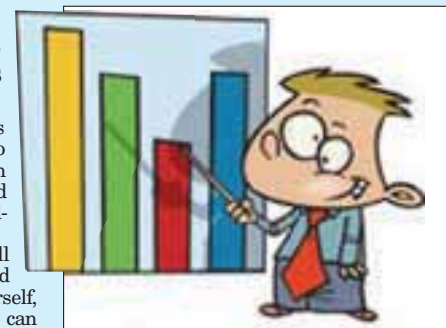
THIS is our fourth supplement celebrating some local success stories and finding out what's in it for you, our readers.

We discover that independent shops really do offer an something different to the chainstores that dominate our town centres, offering you an alternative and more varied way to spend your hard-earned money.

Equally, we hope this supplement will inspire some of you to take the plunge and have a go at being independent yourself, recognising the customer benefits that can bring.

So this is a small glimpse into the world of the independent trader, often operating locally, and offering a unique service.

We live in difficult times financially, but



there is no doubt that those who are successful recognise the importance of great customer service... and that's where you can reap rewards.

Page 4

The heart of a good home is its fire and we meet one trader who has something special to offer

Pages 4-5

Nothing is more personal than having a tattoo where service and 'right first time' is paramount

Page 5

Learning a trade that will also help preserve the planet gets easier at this new Bromley Centre

Page 6

We meet the pub landlord and landlady who have earned an enviable reputation

Pages 6-7

Everyone who drives knows the value of a good mechanic and a garage that understands service

Page 7

Full English? How one garage looks after its customers early in the day as they wait for repairs

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Many benefits of modern windows are clear to see

MANY may think the double glazing market must have reached saturation point. Most old properties that needed new frames 20 years ago will have had them changed by now.

But sales manager Dave Dawes at Fineline windows based in Strood says tighter environmental legislation means there is a still a demand for people replacing their windows.

He said: "We had to respond with a much higher specification product. The thermal properties of windows have improved tremendously, with the advances that have been made in glass technology."

New UPVC window frames now have carefully designed chambers that trap more air, giving better insulation. The glass also has a metallic coating, which reflects the heat back into the home. This means a double-glazed window now has the same thermal performance as a triple-glazed product made 10 years ago.

Mr Dawes said: "People are keen to upgrade, not just because they want better performing windows, they also want the newer, smarter designs."

"Fashions change. People now really want to have windows that remain in keeping with the style of the building and how it was built."

"Older double-glazed windows were very simple. Now we are capable of more elaborate designs that respond to the customer's wishes and we can be much more flexible."

The company, that can trace its roots back to a joinery firm that started in 1942, also works for large clients such as councils, hospitals and housing associations.

Their needs are different from private customers – they require low-maintenance windows that are good for their tenants and reduce decorating costs.

Mr Dawes said: "Private clients have many reasons why they may want to come to us. It is very important that we respond to the customer's requirements and really listen to what they want."

"We concentrate on our core products and give our customers consistent quality."

Price is still a major factor in the market, but Fineline believes customers should be wary of phoenix-style companies that offer cheap prices, go bust and then set up in business again.

Mr Dawes said: "This is something the busi-



QUALITY PRODUCTS: Fineline's products are on display in their show area, and right, sales manager Dave Dawes

ness has suffered from in the past. It does not give the customer long-term security."

Building regulations mean window companies have had to clean up their act.

Any reliable company should be a member of FENSA (The Fenestration Self-Assessment Scheme) to conform to building regulations. That means companies have to offer insurance-backed guarantees or at least make them available to customers.

Mr Dawes said: "We give that free to every customer, as part of the package. Word of mouth is crucial. A lot of our business is obtained that way."

"We also have well established showroom sites where customers can see the products. We don't have to do the hard sell, people come to us because of our reputation."

For more information go to www.fineline-windows.co.uk



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A FIREPLACE is often the heart of a home, providing warmth and comfort and a central focal point to huddle around during cold, wintry nights.

So it's appropriate The Fireplace in Sittingbourne has earned a place at the heart of the community – having worked hard to build a reputation based on reliability and integrity.

Owned by Steven Laskie and Alan Reynolds, this one-stop shop really is a family affair. While the men's partners, Glynis and Sharon, look after the impressively well stocked shop on the Eurolink trading estate, the men are out and about, measuring-up, fitting and replacing fireplaces, boilers and heating systems.

Since buying the firm six years ago the four have invested heavily in the business, nurturing it to one of the best in the district.

"As a company we pride ourselves on the quality of our work and our customer service and our customers are confident about us – that means a lot to us," said Sharon. "We are a family business and unlike the big companies we have a lot invested. So for us it's very important our service level is next to none."

"The relationship we have with our customers is paramount."

Sharon says this is borne out by the number of customers who keep returning and quantity of sales based on recommendations.

"Unlike the bigger companies, the four of us know exactly what's going on and what's been sold at any given time – so we can provide a very personal service."

The Fireplace offers made-to-measure bespoke units supplying a wide range of surrounds in



wood, marble, stone and cast iron.

The company has an impressive showroom displaying leading national brands in surrounds and fires to suit all tastes and budgets – including Magiglow, Newman Fireplaces and Paramount Marble surrounds.

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Home consultations are available for maximum convenience and installations are carried out by Gas Safe registered engineers.

The company is also equipped for boilers and central heating needs including installations, breakdowns and repairs.

So with such high quality products and services supplied at competitive prices it really is worth giving this family-run firm a try.

• The Fireplace is based at 2 Castle Court, Castle Road, Eurolink Industrial Estate, Sittingbourne, ME10 3TG. You can telephone them on 01795 599 234 or email them at info@the-fireplace.net. Alternatively visit the website at www.the-fireplace.net for more details.



Decorating your own

Tattooing may draw mixed reactions from people but when it comes to running a business and customer service, understanding the customer and getting it right first time is essential. **Jill Hurst** spoke with tattoo artist Sooze about her work

A SCULPTOR from Teynham has joined the growing number of painters to diversify into the tattoo industry.

Working under her creative name of Sooze, she has launched Extreme Voltage in London Road, placing her passion for art at the core of the business.

She said: "My partner has run a tattoo business in Sittingbourne for many years and I've spent a lot of time there. I've always had an interest in tattoos but never thought of doing it until he suggested I set up on my own."

"For me the artwork and the quality of the artwork are very important. Tattoos are no longer just about pre-made flash work. People want customised pieces."

"So it's essential for people to have a very clear idea of what they want and understanding the artist's style is very important."

Sooze has an extensive portfolio including the work of one of her favourite artists – Gill



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own personal canvas



Elvgren, one of the most famous pin-up and glamour artists of the 20th century.

She also specialises in work by fantasy artist Boris Vallejo and art nouveau painter Alphonse Mucha.

Gil Elvgren (1914-80) was a classical American illustrator. While his career encompassed many different fields of commercial art his fame is undoubtedly due to a series of pin-ups he painted over a period of 30 years for Brown and Bigelow, calendar publishers of St Paul, Minnesota.

Alphonse Maria Mucha (1860-1939) is most often remembered for the role he played in shaping the aesthetics of French Art Nouveau.

Born in Lima, Peru, in 1941 Boris Vallejo attended the National School of Fine Arts in his native country before emigrating to the USA in 1964. He has since done a great volume of work for the fantasy field.

While more and more artists are trying their hand at the profession Sooze cautions it's not an easily transferable skill.

"You can have an excellent artist but their skills aren't always translated onto the skin – it's a very different canvas."

Sooze says anyone considering a tattoo should do their homework before rushing in. "Look at the tattooist's work and check out their reputation. Make sure they've been trained under proper supervision.

"You must also make sure they have all the correct health and safety requirements in place, including health and hygiene, sterilisation and the correct equipment."

• **Extreme Voltage** is a contemporary studio offering a range of modern facilities. It is open Monday to Friday from 11.30am to 6pm and Saturdays from 10.30am to 6pm. Call Sooze on 07786 569752 for more details.



Giving you the skills to go green

A NEW state-of-the-art Green Technologies Centre has been opened by Ableskills Ltd.

Just two months old, the centre is already helping to boost employment opportunities in the renewable energy sector.

It is part of a joined up approach, working with large companies such as Mitsubishi, Polypipe, Domus and Heating Plumbing Supplies (HPS) to try and encourage growth in the renewable jobs market for the south east.

Customers receive the best training and aftercare to ensure their own success and a positive experience for people installing green technologies on to their properties.

Ableskills Ltd has been trading for several years and has become one of the largest private training companies in the UK, with over 150 people going through different training programmes each week.

This is a real success story for the region and encourages more people to set up business and work to become successful in their own right.

The company has built up a superb reputation for training people in all disciplines of construction, from bricklaying, plastering through to electrics and plumbing and can push green opportunities further with this new centre and an investment approaching £1 million.

Jed Smith, from Ableskills, said: "We are ideally set to increase the skills in the south east, offer a route to employment or business start up and provide specific qualifications across a range of green technologies."

These include solar thermal, heat recovery systems, underfloor heating and rain-water harvesting.

• See www.ableskills.co.uk for more details.

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Pop in for a pint and a chat at friendly local

PART of the attraction of a pint at 'the local' used to be a chat with 'mine host', inevitably someone who had seen life and could be relied on to tell a good tale or two.

That scenario is harder to find these days as theme pubs and national chains with professional managers have increasingly replaced traditional landlords, but there are still corners of the Kentish countryside where a true local can still be found.

One of those quintessential English pubs is the World's Wonder at Warehorne, where John Roberts and his wife Kathy have put down roots after busy careers that have taken them as far afield as Dubai.

When it comes to a chat over a pint, John can drop more names and share more experiences than most, having rubbed shoulders with royalty as well as with The Who, the Rolling Stones, Elton John, Pink Floyd and Roxy Music.

The World's Wonder, which is on the Kenardington Road, also distinguishes itself by focusing on freshly-prepared meals using locally-sourced, free-range produce.

"We cook and prepare all the meals on the premises and we never serve packet foods or pre-packed meals," explained John. "Our business model demands a chef, not a cook, and we are delighted to have Ian Williamson working in that role to help us prove that the World's Wonder is 'where meals are to dine for'."

John left school in 1966 to join the Navy as a radio mechanic in the Fleet Air Arm and left four years later to work for an electronic busi-

ness machine company producing early versions of modern desktop calculators.

He then joined a company called Electrosonic, an industry leader in lighting control, audio and audiovisual systems.

The company boasted a top-flight client list, and it was as field service engineer that John met members of the royal family as well as a huge number of celebrities.

The company also introduced John to the world of microprocessor control systems which was to see him travel to Dubai as an electronic systems specialist in 1982.

Made redundant for the first time in the early 90, John began writing bespoke software for SCA, but when redundancy loomed again 10 years later, John decided it was time to pursue his ambition and set up a pub.

"Kathy and I decided that we would move to a beautiful part of Kent and set up a really great pub selling good beer and fine local food."

The couple have worked hard to ensure the popular gastro-pub has delivered on its promise of freshly-prepared meals using quality local ingredients, and events such as pudding nights, gourmet nights and game nights ensure a steady flow of customers.

The pub also plays an active part in the community, with John taking on the role of Father Christmas at the local school as well as supporting local events. The pub has a website at www.worldswonder.co.uk and can be contacted on 01233 732431.



Family firm aims

Every good garage knows that if you treat a customer well, they will keep coming back, and for the driver, finding the right garage is one of the most important decisions they can make.

Malcolm Triggs meets one of the most successful local garages in Kent to discover some of the its success secrets.

WHILE personal service from an established family business is often seen as the holy grail of our modern, pre-packed lives, there are times when things have to move on.

Ashford-based D&D Autos spent 25 years building up a loyal fan base as an independent, family-run garage on the outskirts of Ashford town centre, before moving to a purpose built unit on an industrial park.

The move from Victoria Road to a smart, sleek and very new-looking building in Moat Way, on Orbital Park, could have been seen as giving in to modern ways, but by keeping customer service at the core of the D&D Autos offer, Derek Petridge and his team made sure it was quickly seen as a huge success.

It was a move that allowed D&D Autos to leave a jumble of different premises in an area where parking was a problem, facilities for customers were challenging and there simply wasn't enough space to offer more services.

Now based on the prestige Orbital Park, D&D Autos can offer a wider range of servic-

es while providing much better surroundings for customers, as well as the workforce – and all without sacrificing the tiniest bit of the local customer service that has set them apart since 1983.

D&D Autos services, repairs and carries out MOT tests on all popular makes of cars, and specialises in VW, Audi, Seat and Skoda.

As a family-run business, D&D Autos is quick to respond to local needs, which is why the garage is currently offering a winter health check that covers everything from coolant and brake fluid levels to anti-freeze strength, tyres, exhaust system and a visual check on brake pads and discs.

The free service takes just 30 minutes, which can be spent enjoying a cup of tea or coffee in the comfortable reception area.

The improved services on offer following the move to Orbital Park also resulted in D&D Autos winning Ashford Invicta Chamber's award for Excellence in Customer Service 2010, as well as picking up a Highly Commended award in the flagship Business of the Year category.

D&D Autos also offers computerised four-wheel alignment that could prove vital to anyone who has driven on Kent's pothole-



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crazed roads following the recent weeks of ice, snow and sub-zero temperatures.

Only the most careful or the luckiest drivers will have avoided all those potholes, which makes checking their wheel alignment a necessity for virtually all the county's drivers.

Correct wheel alignment is critical to safe driving, as well as making tyres last longer, reducing fuel consumption, improving handling and improving the driving experience.

Modern suspension systems are complex, and the only way to check the alignment of all four wheels properly is to use modern, high-tech kit of the kind to be found at the new Moat Way premises of D&D Autos.

It's another new service that the garage couldn't offer from the older, cramped premises, but can now deliver to all its loyal customers as well as to increasing numbers of new ones.

"We just couldn't provide either the quality or the choice of services we wanted to offer when we were based in Victoria Road, and when I couldn't find anything suitable in the town we took the plunge and designed our own building in Moat Way," explained Derek Pestridge.

"It has given us the space and facilities we needed to provide our service across a wider range of activities," he said.

Contact D&D Autos on 01233 504765 or email info@ddautosashford.co.uk.



WORKING TOGETHER: From left, workshop manager Matthew Pestridge, business owner Derek Pestridge and customer service manager Richard Pestridge, of D&D Autos, outside the firm's new base in Moat Way on Orbital Park, Ashford.

Early birds get free breakfast

TWO Sittingbourne businesses have joined forces to provide early morning workers with the most important meal of the day.

JCB Volkswagen Van Centre and Sittingbourne Cafe launched a temporary customer service initiative in 2009 to provide JCB's service customers with a breakfast voucher while their vehicle was being worked on.

But after more than 1,000 people used the 'early bird' service in the first year, it's now being introduced permanently.

Matt Rochester, aftersales manager at JCB Sittingbourne Van Centre, said: "Every month, nearly 100 service customers come to our St Michael's Road site enjoy a breakfast at the Sittingbourne Cafe while they wait for work to be carried out on their vehicle."

"The phenomenal success of the early bird initiative has taken us all by surprise and we've now decided to make it permanent."

"We introduced it for customers who need to be on the road early and we're delighted with the positive feedback."

Steve Beard, from Chatham-based Rainham Refrigeration, said: "It's a fantastic idea and means our vans are serviced without any impact on the working day. 'The food is great and we'll be using this service every time our vehicles serviced or in for an MOT'."

Matt added: "JCB's service department is open from 6am, but as the cafe opens at 7am, customers can enjoy refreshments in our waiting area until breakfast is served."

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